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To pay or not to pay?

MIKE DIBATTISTA/QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

Private companies looking after parking lots at hospitals, commercial properties and apartment buildings have different rules that govern what happens when someone fails to pay these tickets. Some residents have found they can get away without paying the tickets because it's too costly to take them to small claims court. See story on page 2.

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UPFRONT

■ COLUMN: Tony's Desk

Parking tickets from a private company are different

Don't take any legal advice from me, but if you happen to get a parking ticket at one of the local hospitals or at an apartment complex in your city, don't be in such a rush to pay it until you know all the facts.

A bit of work might be involved, but there's a good chance it will save you some, or possibly all, of your money.

I had no idea about this issue until Loretta Morrissey, a friend of mine from years ago, brought it to my attention. She received a ticket for $49 after dropping off a family member at the emergency department of the Greater Niagara General Hospital.

Loretta has a valid disability permit on the dash of her vehicle, which allows her to park in a designated handicap parking spot anywhere in the city without having to pay any meter or parking machine.

She thought the ticket was unfair and declined to pay it. But, what was even more important to her is that people be informed when it comes to these types of tickets because they are issued by a private company.

The rules are slightly different when it comes down to fighting or challenging a ticket that is issued by police or a bylaw enforcement officer, and one that is issued by a private company.

After making numerous phone calls, and going back and forth with emails trying to find out what is the process if someone decides they want to fight one of these private tickets in court, it turns out they don't take people to court.

That seems strange because the accused person doesn't even get a chance to tell their side of the story, to an independent judge or justice of the peace, and have that person decide their guilt or innocence.

If you wish to dispute a parking ticket from a private company, there's an address on the back of the ticket where you can send that information.

Apparently, they have a panel that reviews your information and they decide whether the ticket stands, or if they are willing to reduce the amount, or if they are willing to void it.

That doesn't seem very democratic. What gives a private company the right to be your judge, your jury and your executioner?

What happened to our basic democratic right of being innocent until proven guilty?

A parking ticket is nothing more than an allegation that is made by one side, against another party, that they did something wrong.

Nothing has been proven.

After getting a parking ticket, most people are usually upset, but they end up paying it because it's usually not very much and it would take more time and effort to try and fight it. It's not financially feasible to take the day off work and go to court to fight a $20 or $50 ticket, or to even hire a paralegal or a lawyer. It's cost prohibitive.

While that can work against you when trying to prove your innocence, that can work for you when a private company is trying to prove you are guilty.

It's also cost prohibitive for a private company to take someone to small claims court because there are fees that need to be paid to start that action, and they would also have to hire a paralegal or lawyer to present that case, let alone making sure they have all their witnesses ready to testify, including the person who actually wrote that ticket.

I was almost tempted to get a parking ticket at the hospital and rip it up just to prove that nothing happens once you get one of these.

I decided against it after having a long discussion about this issue with lawyers Ronald Charlebois and Brenda Sandulak.

While a private company is not likely to take someone to court because of the costs, they might wish to make an example out of me if I made such a statement.

Charlebois and Sandulak also explained the problems someone might have if that unpaid parking ticket is handed over to the credit bureau and ends up on your credit history.

So, as I said earlier, don't take any legal advice from me, but Charlebois joked that if he ever gets one of these tickets I have spent so much time researching this topic that he is going to give me a call.

He didn't charge me for his legal advice, so it's only fair that I don't charge him for my two cents.

tony.ricciuto@sunmedia.ca

PARKINGINVOICE

PARKING INVOICE

Invoice Number: 140804442
Date: 08/08/2014 Time: 18:00

VEHICLE INFORMATION

Plate: DEAN7629 ON

Make: DODGE Model: CARAVAN

PARTICULARS

Location: 5546 PORTAGE ROAD

Reason 1: NH.01
Failed to Display Valid Receipt
Amount: $49.00

Invoice Amount: $49.00
If paid by 15/08/2014
Discounted To: $25.00
Comments:
CLEAR DASH
HST # 881490627RT0001

Issuer Number: 1235

PRECISE PARKLINK INC.

PLEASE READ REVERSE SIDE
ISSUER CANNOT CANCEL INVOICE

LOCALNEWS

■ **HEALTH CARE:** Committee wants to send strong message to Queen's Park

Petition launched to save Welland hospital

MARYANNE FIRTH
QMI Agency Niagara

There's strength in numbers.

And to help the numbers grow, the Save Our Welland Hospital committee is moving on several fronts to spread word of the cause in the community.

About 70 people gathered at Welland Civic Square Sunday for an update on the campaign that strives to keep the local hospital open and its services in place. The meeting acted as an official launch for a new petition calling on the provincial government to stop the planned closure of the Welland hospital.

The document also demands the government conduct a rigorous, third-party, evidence-based study to assess the current and projected health care and hospital service requirements of residents in the hospital's catchment area; and asks that public consultations be held, not only during the assessment process but also on recommendations resulting from the study.

"We want to have them all over the place," steering committee co-chair Sue Hotte said of the petitions, which will be circulating in the community until March 1.

Hotte was elected co-chair alongside Andre Roy at Sunday's meeting.

"We're trying to save the hospital, and the more people we have involved the better it is. It just helps it grow," Hotte told the crowd.

"Get all your neighbours, friends and family involved so we have a swell of people saying, 'We need to keep the hospital open. We need to put more money into hospital services.'"

Before the committee can approach the government calling for a redirection, it must get as many people on board as possible, Hotte said.

"We need to build up a tremendous amount of support in our communities, including Port Colborne, Wainfleet and Pelham."

To help spread word of the campaign, work is underway to create Save Our Welland Hospital buttons, with potential to expand to scarves and informative business cards.

The hospital closure is "not a done deal yet, though many people seem to think that," said outreach committee chair John Krajcovic, who hoped the cards would encourage people to call an advocate to learn more about the cause.

However, in a visit to Niagara Falls in February 2014, then-health minister Deb Matthews said "the decision has been made" to build the new south Niagara hospital in Niagara Falls.

"The site has been studied every which way and the board of the NHS has determined that the site at Lyons (Creek Rd.) and QEW is the right site that will serve the entire region," she said.

"The decision is now made," she added, including the closing of existing south Niagara hospital facilities and replacing them with two free-standing urgent care centres.

For Welland's new campaign, a community booth is expected to be set up at Seaway Mall sometime in the next two weeks to inform the public about the campaign's mission and allow residents to sign the petition.

Volunteers are needed to man the booth and assist on the campaign's fundraising, outreach, research and communication subcommittees.

Fundraising events, including a pasta dinner and walkathon, are in the planning stages to help with the cost of the campaign.

The research subcommittee intends to "scrutinize Kevin Smith's 2012 report" and delve into the impact the proposed closure will have on the city and its economy, said chair Fiona McMurran.

That information will be presented to the government alongside the petition.

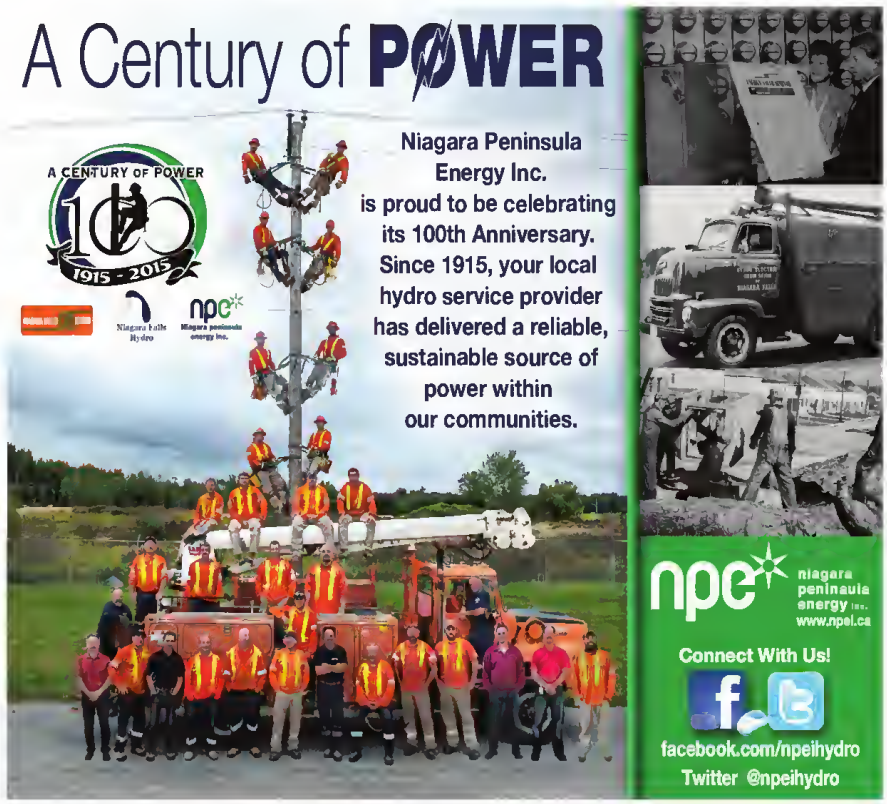
"I'm not going to rest until we get a fair deal," McMurran said.

"We have not been dealt with fairly, and we need to show (the government) that."

Copies of the petition are expected to be available online soon, but until that point can be acquired by contacting Hotte at 905-932-1646.

MARYANNE FIRTH/QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

Save Our Welland Hospital steering committee co-chair Sue Hotte hands out copies of a petition launched Sunday to preserve local health-care services.



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COMMENT

Electing the chair to become more accountable, open and democratic

DAVE AUGUSTYN
For Pelham News

Because the regional chair holds an extremely important leadership role in Niagara, and now that we have appointed a chair, I believe it's time to start the process now so that all Niagara residents can elect the regional chair "at large" in 2018.

The full-time regional chair sets the legislative and economic agendas for the region, presides over council meetings, votes on every committee, and is the "face" of Niagara with provincial, national and other governments.

So, while serving as the face of the entire Niagara Region, ironically, the regional chair is only accountable to the majority of regional councillors.

Our current process of appointing a sitting member of council as chair comes from the Baldwin Act of 1849, which established local county councils. The names of the annually appointed, former Wardens of Welland County and Lincoln County, are etched on two plaques at regional headquarters across from Brock University.

When they first created regional governments in the 1970s, the province also appointed the first regional chairs. After our first chair (John Campbell) retired in 1985, council appointed one of its own as chair (Wilber Dick).

But, this appointment differs significantly from county councils days — the new chair give up his or her seat and is appointed for the entire four-year term of council.

All other Ontario Regional governments have already either adopted a more accountable and democratic process to directly elect their regional chair at large or are in the process of doing so.

Waterloo Region (Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, Wilmot, Wellesley, Woolwich, and North Dumfries) began electing its chair 17 years ago. Halton Region (Burlington, Oakville, Milton, and Halton Hills) has elected a regional chair since 2000. Durham Region (Pickering, Ajax, Uxbridge, Oshawa, Whitby, and Clarington) first elected its regional chair last fall.

A bill to elect the York Region (Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, King, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Vaughan, Whitchurch–Stouffville) chair "at large" is currently before the Ontario legislature. Finally, in 2013, Peel Regional Council (Brampton, Mississauga, and Caledon) directed staff to report in 2015 on options to directly elect its chair for 2018.

It's time for Niagara.

It's clear that the way in which Niagara Region currently appoints its regional chair is antiquated, undemocratic, and out of synch with all other regions in Ontario.

That's why I am making a motion at regional council on Thursday to begin the process to change toward a directly elected chair. If you agree, please contact your regional councillor.

Let's work together now to become more open, transparent, accountable and democratic in Niagara,

You may provide your ideas and feedback to Mayor Dave at mayordave@pelham.ca or read past columns at www.pelhammayordave.blogspot.com.

Shipwrecks – Echo

SKIP GILLHAM
For QMI Agency Niagara

The 88.4-metre-long Dutch freighter *Echo* was built in 1961 and came through the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1968 and 1969.

It was sold later in 1969 and renamed *Ljosafoss*. It was registered in Iceland until 1972 when the ship was resold to French interests, converted to a fish carrier and given a third name of *Pecheur Breton*.

It moved to the Indian Ocean, with registry in Seychelles in 1985. The vessel operated for the Mahe Peche Co. from 1990 to 1994 and was then sold to Honduran buyers who were likely working as agents for shipbreakers.

Pecheur Breton, the former *Echo*, foundered on July 1, 1994. The ship went down off Galbokka Light, south of the port of Colombo, on a voyage from Seychelles to India, via Sri Lanka. The vessel had been sold for scrap after 33 years of service but cheated the shipbreakers by being lost in the Indian Ocean.

RENE BEAUCHAMP/SUPPLIED PHOTO
Echo, shown in this undated photo.

■ HEALTH

Niagara under attack from flu

BOB TYMCZYSZYN
QMI Agency Niagara

If you've got a headache, chills and cough, you might be seeing the first symptoms of the flu.

The seasonal ailment is making its way through the province and Niagara is not immune.

The flu will likely hit its peak in the next week or two, said Jennifer Sharron, manager for the infectious diseases program with Niagara Public Health.

"When we look at our surveillance reports, we can see that in the Golden Horseshoe is right in the midst of widespread influenza," she said. "In Niagara, we're almost there.

"The numbers that are being reported show that it is just at the cusp of being at its peak. We are very close to it. I wouldn't be surprised if the next report in the next week or two says that we are at our peak."

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, influenza, or the flu, infects millions of Canadians every year. The highly contagious infectious respiratory disease begins in the nose and throat, and can spread rapidly from person to person.

Influenza cases result in approximately 12,200 hospitalizations and on average, 3,500 deaths in Canada each year.

This year, the H3N2 influenza has been the most common strain circulating in North America. People 65 and older are usually the most affected by the H3 flu type.

While health professionals admit there is a mismatch with the flu vaccine this year, they still suggest people get the vaccine.

"The vaccine has proven to provide some cross protection against the current strain," said Sharron. "And it can prevent the symptoms from being severe. It does cover some other strains, and who's to say next month that we may see influenza B coming and we know there's a match for that.

"Hospitals are seeing the patient demand pressures in their emergency departments, witb patients showing influenza-like symptoms," said Sharron.

Signs to look for are the sudden onset of illness and fever, extreme weariness and achiness, headache and chills — "these are all good signs that this is not a regular cold," said Sharron.

"If you're sick with flu symptoms, you should just stay home and avoid contact with other people, except to get medical care."

For certain people who are at bigb risk with flu-related complications, it's better to contact their family doctor and get directions from them, she added.

She said residents should feel free to call the Niagara public health department with questions or queries about vaccinations. It can be reached at 905-688-8248 ext. 7425.

HOW TO AVOID THE FLU

Clean hands frequently.

Cough and sneeze into your arm, not your hand. If you use a tissue, dispose of it as soon as possible and wash your hands.

If you get sick, stay home.

Keep your hands away from your face.

Keep common surface areas like doorknobs, light switches, telephones and keyboards clean and disinfected.

Eat healthy foods and stay physically active to keep your immune system strong.

— Niagara Public Health

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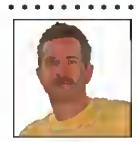

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LOCALNEWS

POLICE: 'Put the handheld devices down'

Distracted drivers targeted in Welland, Pelham

MARYANNE FIRTH
QMJ Agency Niagara

It could result in a $280 fine.

Or in something much worse.

To avoid the potentially dire consequences of distracted driving, police are reminding residents to resist the urge to pick up a phone while behind the wheel.

Though enforcement is in effect all year round, Niagara Regional Police officers in Welland and Pelham will be paying close attention to distracted drivers over the next month.

With winter weather expected to bring heavy snowfall and create icy roadways in the coming weeks, there's no better time to say "put the handheld devices down and pay attention," NRP Insp. Jim McCaffery said.

January is also a key time to educate drivers, he said, because many people are starting 2015 with new technology found under the Christmas tree.

"We just want to remind people of the legislation and remind them that technology is there for them to enjoy — just not when driving."

"There's nothing that urgent that it can't wait," McCaffery said.

"Pull over and only answer when you can do so in a safe manner."

Officers in Welland and Pelham will be taking on a different initiative each month throughout the year, concentrating on a variety of local issues that need to be addressed.

Many of the suggested focuses come directly from observations of frontline officers, McCaffery said.

Distracted driving was chosen as the first issue to tackle, he said, because it was deemed prevalent by those out on patrol.

Each platoon is working to create an action plan to roll out the initiative, which will hit the streets "as soon as possible," he said.

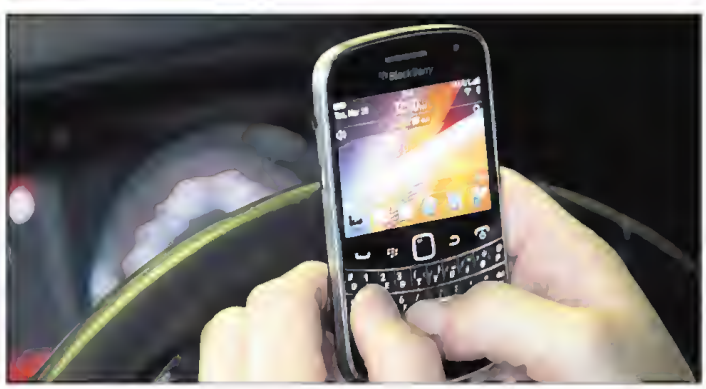
Officers will use their discretion during the initiative to determine whether to issue a warning or $280 fine to offending drivers.

While cellphone use is the main target, any distracted driving practices that come to the attention of police will be addressed.

maryanne.firth@sunmedia.ca
Twitter: @mfirthTribune

TOTAL OFFENCES IN 2014 ISSUED BY NIAGARA REGIONAL POLICE FOR DRIVING WITH A HAND-HELD COMMUNICATION DEVICE

Pelham: 14
Welland: 116
Those numbers do not include tickets issued for drivers watching TV, using a GPS, tablet or other devices, which result in a different charge.



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RECREATION PROGRAMS & CLASSES

Zumba Classes @ Pelham Arena:

Tuesday, January 20	9:30 am-10:30 am	Wednesday, Jan 21	7:30 pm-8:30 pm
Tuesday, January 20	7:00 pm-8:00 pm	Thursday, Jan 22	10:00 am-11:00 am

Walking Club - Everyone is welcome! – January 20 & 22

Interested in joining a Walking Club? Then join ours! Tuesdays at Pelham Arena from 9-10 am and Thursdays at Fonthill Bandshell from 9-10:30 am. For more information, please contact (905) 892-2607 ext. 329.

Arena Programs

Public Skating	Adult Public Skating	Adult/Preschool	Men's Shinny Hockey	Women's Shinny Hockey	Women's Learn to Play Hockey	NEW! Hockey Skills Hour	Pelham Panthers Home Games
Friday Jan 16 4:00 – 5:00 pm **Tuesday Jan 20** 7:30-8:30 pm **Friday Jan 23** 4:00-5:00 pm	**Thursday Jan 22** 1:00 – 2:00 pm	**Friday Jan 16** 10:00 – 11:00 am **Tuesday Jan 20** 1:00 – 2:00 pm **Friday Jan 23** 10:00-11:00 am	**Friday Jan 16** 9:00 – 10:00 am **Tuesday Jan 20** 8:30 – 9:30 am **Friday Jan 23** 9:00-10:00 am	**Monday Jan 19** 9:30-10:45 am **Thursday Jan 22** 10:30-11:45 am	**Thursday Jan 22** 9:30 – 10:30 am	**Monday Jan 19** 11 am – 12 pm **Thursday Jan 22** 2:00-3:00 pm	**Friday Jan 16** vs. Thorold **Friday Jan 23** vs. Caledonia

NEW! Hockey Skills Hour – Come out to practice your hockey skills and learn from a Pelham Panthers Jr. B. Trainer. Ages 10 and up welcome. Shinny rates apply.

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Downtown Fenwick "Open for Business" A major part of the Downtown Fenwick Revitalization construction work is now complete, and all local merchants, shops and businesses are ready to welcome you! So next time you are in the area, why not stop in and say hello? Help spread the word and tell you family and friends to do the same.

Summer Student Jobs

Calling all students (who are between the ages of 15-30 and returning to school in September 2015)! The Town of Pelham is accepting resumes for a number of exciting summer opportunities!

Visit **pelham.ca/career-opportunities** for more details & please remember to apply for **all** the positions you may be interested in.

Deadline is **Friday, January 30, 2015**.

THANK YOU: The Pelham Communities in Bloom Committee would like to thank Lazy Loon Restaurant, My Place Bar & Grill, The Urban Steakhouse and Tim Horton's Fonthill for their support in the 2014 Outdoor light Competition.

The Village of Fenwick celebrated its 160th Anniversary in June 2013. Now you have the opportunity to be a part of Fenwick's future. Purchase a granite brick to be incorporated into the downtown Fenwick Beautification Project. **Standard, double, veteran's and corporate bricks are available.** Visit pelham.ca for details or come in to Town Hall (20 Pelham Town Square, Fonthill).

Pelham NIAGARA

NEW **Ballroom Dance Lessons**

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LOCALNEWS

■ COMMUNITY

Crime doesn't pay; Crime Stoppers does

GREG FURMINGER
QMI Agency Niagara

Less than 30% of reward money paid to Crime Stoppers of Niagara tipsters — tens of thousands of dollars — is ever claimed.

"Most of the information provided to us comes from good citizens who just want to get crime off the streets," says Claude Tremblay, chairman of the 12 very active members of the non-profit organization's board.

But despite Crime Stoppers' constant reminders that the crime-reporting tool operates wholly on the condition of anonymity, fellow board member Maria Izzo says many people still question that guarantee.

"That may also add to why they're not picking up their money," she says.

"Some of the tipsters are calling in information on their neighbours, their family, their friends, and they may fear that they're going to be exposed."

People who do provide tips to Crime Stoppers are those reluctant to call police, those who don't really want to get involved, but feel they must.

When they contact Crime Stoppers, nothing is known about them at the other end of the phone line, or computer terminal.

Software strips any identifier about the tipster — phone numbers, caller names, IP addresses. The encrypted information cannot be tracked.

"We don't want to know," says Tremblay.

Callers are given an identifying number that they can use to provide additional tips at a later date, to check in on how their information panned out, and whether as a result of their tip reward money is waiting.

The number is also written on an envelope containing reward money if awarded, typically left at a partnering bank, and is claimed by the tipster simply by citing that number. No questions asked.

More than $76,800 in reward money — awarded on arrests, not convictions — has been paid since the Niagara Crime Stoppers was formed in 1985.

People can report crime via the popular 1-800-222-TIPS phone number, sent through a secure form at www.niagaratips.com or by texting 274637 (CRIMES) with the word NIAGARA with the message to ensure it's received.

Tips have included information about murder, robbery, rape, assaults, drug and firearm offences.

And tips may also be about crimes not yet committed but about to happen, and about witnesses who may not have come forward to police — not just about perpetrators.

See CRIME STOPPERS on Page 9

GREG FURMINGER/QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

Three of the members of the volunteer board for Crime Stoppers of Niagara: From the top, Ernie Sibbett, Claude Tremblay and Maria Izzo.

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LOCALNEWS

■ CRIME STOPPERS

Tipster reward money goes unclaimed in Niagara, despite assurances of anonymity

From Page 8

"Behind fingerprints and DNA, Crime Stoppers is the best method of solving crime," Tremblay says, citing the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs' position.

To back that up, Tremblay points to Niagara statistics available since the early 1990s — not to its earliest years — that show more than 1,900 arrests have been made as a result of Crime Stoppers, more than 3,404 cases have been cleared, more than $5.9 million worth of property has been recovered and more than $30.7 million in drugs seized.

"The program works," Tremblay says.

"The people who provide us this information can never, ever be called to testify," he says of a statute handed down by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1977.

Similar protection is not afforded to confidential informants to police, who could be subpoenaed by the courts.

Tremblay notes if a person was to identify himself or herself to Crime Stoppers, they would immediately be referred to police, who could consider whether to give that person the less secretive informant status.

The first Crime Stoppers program was founded in 1976 by a Canadian living in New Mexico. It has since expanded to 1,200 programs operating in more than 30 countries.

In Niagara, a regional police officer is "on loan" to Crime Stoppers during daytime hours to receive tips; at all other hours, specially trained call-service employees field calls then relay them to authorities, both funded through the police budget.

But Crime Stoppers, says Tremblay, is an independent charity.

"We're not associated with the police at all — we're completely detached," he says.

Its board members meet once a month, usually the third Wednesday of the month, to discuss reward money payments and Crime Stoppers initiatives.

On the reward side of things, law enforcement investigators will report back to the board about how tips have helped lead to arrests. They then decide upon the amount of the reward money — a sum not revealed to a tipster before it is claimed. If the money goes unclaimed after six months, it reverts back to Crime Stoppers from the pickup point, but can be claimed beyond that time period by reactivating the process.

Unclaimed rewards in 2014 include the maximum $2,000 amount — the first that comes to mind in recent year's memory, Tremblay says. Details can not be shared.

But criminals be warned: some people won't hesitate picking up the phone to make a buck while doing good.

Remember, crime doesn't pay; Crime Stoppers does.

greg.furminger@sunmedia.ca
Twitter: @GregAtTheTrib

HOW TIP-REPORTING METHODS WORK

Phone tips

Tips are received at the local Crime Stoppers tips line phone.

The phone is not tied in to a broader phone system, it does not subscribe to caller ID, and conversations are not recorded.

Appropriate law enforcement receives the information, be it regional police, Natural Resources Ministry officers or another service.

Online tips

This unique system allows the tipster to come back and provide additional information at any time and provides the ability for feedback to the tipster.

Text tips

Crime Stoppers receives only the content of the text message and a Tipster ID assigned by software. Crime Stoppers will be able to reply back without knowing your true identity or cellphone number.

CONTACT CRIME STOPPERS 24/7

Phone: 1-800-222-8477 (1-800-222-TIPS)
E-mail tips@vaxxine.com
Website www.crimestoppersofniagara.com
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■ MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

Councillor apologizes to police chief

ROB HOULE
QMI Agency Niagara

Apology extended, apology accepted.

Regional councillor Andy Petrowski last Wednesday said he was sorry to Niagara Regional Police Chief Jeff McGuire for comments the St. Catharines politician wrote in an e-mail that was copied to a number of other people.

"I would like to offer a full and complete apology for, and retraction of, my e-mail dated Sept. 9, 2014," Petrowski wrote in an e-mail to McGuire that was obtained by QMI Agency Niagara.

The e-mail was copied to regional politicians, NRP deputy chiefs and Niagara Regional Police services board members.

"The e-mail was inappropriate and was conveyed in an entirely unacceptable manner. I retract the e-mail and also agree that all recipients on that original e-mail be advised of this."

Petrowski went on to ask that McGuire withdraw a complaint about the original e-mail he filed with Niagara Region integrity commissioner George Rust D'Eye on Sept. 25.

The police chief was quick to reply, in an e-mail also obtained by QMI Agency Niagara.

"Councillor Petrowski, be advised that I accept your apology and retraction and I now consider the matter to be closed," McGuire wrote.

Regional councillors recently elected Petrowski as one of three region representatives to the police services board, a fact he said Wednesday afternoon had some bearing on his decision to apologize.

While he said he didn't think McGuire's complaint needed to be filed, "I could have probably approached my issue differently. I want to move on, start the police board term with a clean slate."

Petrowski — who has been the subject of a handful of integrity commissioner complaints, all of which were dismissed with the exception of one the commissioner said was not within his purview — said the apology was also offered to save taxpayer dollars.

"I believe it's more important to stop wasting tax dollars on an integrity commissioner report and enter the police board term with a clean slate," Petrowski said.

"I believe an apology would accomplish two things — it would stop the integrity commissioner, and would also probably create a cleaner slate for me to start the new term of police board."

A telephone voicemail left with McGuire was not returned.

However, the chief did comment in an e-mail to QMI Agency Niagara.

"I have accepted the apology and retraction and all recipients of the original e-mail will be provided a copy of today's apology and retraction," McGuire wrote.

"I am in the process of notifying the integrity commissioner that I am withdrawing my complaint, having received the apology and retraction. We both agree that the matter is now closed and I will not be making any further comment on this."

Petrowski would not discuss the e-mail that was subject of the complaint when first contacted mid-afternoon Wednesday. However, a copy of it was obtained by QMI Agency Niagara later that afternoon.

The e-mail in question is among a chain of messages that was started by a Niagara resident asking regional councillors to publicly give their opinion regarding an NRP officer who pleaded guilty to assaulting a photographer in 2012 but was still a member of the police service.

Follow-up e-mails eventually included the police chief, who told the resident due process had been followed regarding the officer in question.

In one of the e-mails in the chain that followed, Petrowski wrote to the resident and accused McGuire of interfering "behind the scenes with an important in-camera decision which has been ratified by regional council."

That comment was the basis for McGuire's complaint.

Reached early Wednesday night, Petrowski would not offer much further comment.

"I have to pass. Like the chief says, from my point of view the case is closed, I am very comfortable with the apology I made and I want to move on," Petrowski said.

"I think there's integrity moving forward, past this issue, and not discussing the specifics of the chief's complaint any further."

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■ MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

Gale says councillors 'prostitutes for money'

ROB HOULE
QMI Agency Niagara

Cashing in on a program they acknowledge is bad for all provincial taxpayers makes regional politicians "prostitutes for the money," a councillor says.

Niagara Region's corporate services committee endorsed a plan last Wednesday that would see the regional government enter into MicroFIT agreements with the province to sell it electricity generated from solar panel installations on 16 region buildings.

A staff report says the region can expect its $553,000 outlay for the installation to yield "an average return on investment of 8% over the 20-year agreements with a nine-year payback period."

While the anticipated profit was acknowledged as a solid investment for Niagara, many regional councillors were critical of MicroFIT and the Green Energy Act, which they blamed for skyrocketing electricity bills.

Niagara Falls Coun. Bob Gale was frustrated the Region was in a position to gain from a program he and others noted generates excess electricity that's being sold at a loss to New York State, where discounted electricity is used as bait to lure industry there.

"The common denominator is, 'I'll vote for this, but ...' We all know what's wrong," Gale said. "I'm new at this, but I see that we've got a waste here of money that we're all paying into, it's gone on for years and no one's going to complain, but everybody is going to jump on this.

"This is so wrong it isn't funny. I'm going to support it like everybody else, but we're all prostitutes for the money."

St. Catharines Coun. Bruce Timms said, "I will support the program. It's obvious we have to take advantage of it, because others will if we don't.

"If we don't make our best efforts to take advantage of it, we'd just be paying out of both pockets. This way, something does come back to the regional taxpayer, even if you're dishing it out on your hydro bill."

Wainfleet Mayor April Jeffs said, "I'm struggling with this one, because I do see the financial benefit to the region. But I'm concerned. I just had a constituent set up an appointment with me to discuss what the township and the Region are doing to address the increasing hydro rates, and then here we sit today. So it's a bit of a conundrum."

Fort Erie Coun. Sandy Annunziata said the Green Energy Act was not good for the province as a whole, but was supportive of the Region's solar projects because of the return on investment.

BARRICK CHAIR

Prior to the first corporate services committee meeting of the new council, Port Colborne Coun. David Barrick was elected chair, beating Pelham Mayor Dave Augustyn in a 15-6 vote. St. Catharines Coun. Andy Petrowski was voted vice-chair, defeating Augustyn 13-7.

A motion presented by Niagara Falls Coun. Selina Volpatti asking that the committee have co-chairs was passed, meaning Petrowski, upon approval by regional council, will become co-chair.

The chairs of standing committees receive an annual stipend of $2,000.

LOCALNEWS

■ BREWERIES

Glass half empty on Beer Store announcement

KARENA WALTER
QMI Agency Niagara

QMI AGENCY FILE PHOTO

Craft breweries in Niagara had more questions on tap than answers last Wednesday about The Beer Store's surprise announcement it will open up ownership to all Ontario breweries.

The announcement — which comes after repeated criticism of the private, foreign-owned Beer Store's near-monopoly — was "out of left field," said one brewer.

"It is a complete and utter surprise to us," said Matthew Swan, co-owner of Silversmith Brewing Co. in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

"A whole lot of details would need to be worked out."

The Beer Store said Wednesday that small Ontario brewers will be allowed to stock two of their products at the five Beer Store locations closest to their brewery for free.

They will also be able to stock those two products at other stores beyond the closest five for a reduced listing fee.

The company's shareholder agreement is also changing, allowing breweries with Beer Store sales under five million litres a year to get a preferred share in the company for $100. Those breweries with sales over five million litres a year will pay $1,000 for a preferred share.

The Beer Store is owned by three multinationals — Anheuser-Busch, Molson Coors and Sapporo.

"As a result of these changes all Ontario brewers will be able to participate in the management of the company and the smallest Ontario brewers will get improved opportunities to grow their sales volumes at a significantly reduced cost," Beer Store president Ted Moroz said in a statement.

The three current owners of the Beer Store will continue to dominate the new board, holding 12 of the 15 seats.

Silversmith's Swan said the announcement doesn't address the biggest issue on the table for small breweries — getting beer into the hands of consumers in an equitable way.

He said Ontario's system is a dinosaur and the province's decision to grant multinationals a monopoly to sell beer is baffling.

"Our major competitors are the largest multinational beer companies in the world who own The Beer Store, so there are still some issues that would have to be worked out for our ideal situation to arise," Swan said.

"It's out of left field, and not a lot of information."

Cian MacNeill of Niagara Oast House Brewery in Niagara-on-the-Lake said craft breweries want to see a fundamental change in the way Ontario distributes beer.

The announcement, which he said "blindsided" them, is far from that.

"It might be a small step in the right direction, but we would certainly like as much freedom to reach our market as is entitled to the big guys," MacNeill said.

The idea of being able to put their product in the five closest Beer Stores for no listing fees could be a benefit to a rural brewery like Oast in reaching urban areas of Niagara, he said.

Ideally, he said, craft breweries would like their products showcased the way they want in the markets they want to be in — instead of another group controlling how much they can bring in and how it is displayed.

Rod Daigle, co-owner of Brimstone Brewing Co. in Ridgeway, said he was skeptical of the announcement.

"My initial gut reaction is it's a little bit knee-jerk and it may very well be designed to quell complaints from brewers in the province by giving them ownership," said Daigle.

"It's been heating up a lot over the last six months or so, and suddenly there's this announcement. So I'm a little bit skeptical."

Daigle said Brimstone, opened in 2013, hasn't been in the position to approach The Beer Store because of volume and pricing requirements. If those requirements change, he said, they would be happy to look at it because the brewery is in a growing phase.

"We'd welcome as many avenues as possible to get our beer out to the public."

Currently, most craft breweries sell their beer at their breweries, in bars and restaurants and in some cases at the LCBO.

Local brewers echoed the association Ontario Craft Brewers, which said in a statement the announcement came as a "complete surprise" to its members.

Association chair Cam Heaps said in a press release the association was not consulted by The Beer Store.

"Our goal continues to be fundamental change to Ontario's beer distribution channels that will result in a doubling or tripling of the jobs currently created by the craft brewers as well as the ability to reach our share of market potential," he said in a statement.

The announcement comes in the wake of increased criticism about The Beer Store.

In August, the C.D. Howe Institute report Uncorking a Strange Brew: The Need for More Competition in Ontario's Alcoholic Beverage Retailing System, recommended the province eliminate The Beer Store's "quasi-monopoly."

An expert panel reviewing Ontario government assets, meanwhile, recommended last fall the private sector monopoly be left in place to maintain a cost-effective delivery system, but that craft breweries be given greater opportunities to expand their business.

Susie Heath, a spokesman for Finance Minister Charles Sousa, said the government asset advisory council will consider this announcement in the context of its work," Heath said in an e-mail.

– with files from QMI Agency
karena.walter@sunmedia.ca

LOCALNEWS

■ **GAS PRICES:** Cheaper fuel has drivers filling up closer to home

Getting relief at the pumps

ALISON LANGLEY
QMI Agency Niagara

With gas prices sitting below $1 a litre across the region, the long-standing tradition of filling up south of the border is starting to lose its appeal.

"It's not worth the effort because you're not going to save anything," said Dan McTeague, a senior petroleum analyst for the price-tracking website Gasbuddy.com.

On Saturday, the average price in Niagara Falls, Ont., was 88.8 cents a litre. In Niagara Falls, N.Y., the price was an average of US$2.72 per gallon, the equivalent of CDN87.6 cents a litre.

Add the bridge toll and the exchange rate if paying by credit card and the end result is "there is no deal" to buy gas over the border, McTeague said.

Jessica Friesen, CEO of Niagara-based Gales Fuels, added: "By the time you factor in your time going over the border and taking into consideration where the Canadian dollar is right now and where the gas prices are right now, it makes sense to me to stay here."

Friesen said she's noticed an increase in customers as prices continue to fall.

"It hasn't been extravagant, but definitely I'm seeing a positive change in what's happening out there," she said.

In recent months, crude oil prices have fallen drastically, contributing to a surplus supply with record production levels.

"The prices are reflecting, for the first time in over 10 years, the fundamentals of supply and demand," said McTeague.

"The world is producing 2.5 million barrels of oil that it can't possibly use every day. There's no end of sellers, just not enough takers."

McTeague, a former Liberal MP, expects prices to stay consistent in the foreseeable future.

"I don't see things going down any time soon."

Despite the savings, some motorists continue to cross the border to fill up.

"I still go over occasionally because I think I still get a better deal because I pick up a few groceries as well," said John Cuviello, who stopped at a McLeod Rd. gas station on Saturday.

Drivers are pleased with what they're seeing at the pumps.

"It is nice to have a little extra money in your pocket after you fill up," said Sherri Vanguard as she filled up her minivan at the same gas station.

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Twitter: @nfallslangley

GAS PRICES

Average price per litre Jan. 10, 2015: 88.8 cents
Average price per litre Jan. 10, 2014: $123.2
Average price per litre Jan. 10, 2013: $123.4
Average price per litre Jan. 10, 2012: $125.8

ALISON LANGLEY / QMI AGENCY NIAGARA
Gasoline prices in Niagara Falls averaged 88.8 cents per litre over the weekend.

■ **SHIPPING**

Dry docks gets lease for Algoma work

DON FRASER
QMI Agency Niagara

Algoma Central Corp. has entered into a three-month lease at the Port Weller dry docks.

Maintenance work is being done on the *Algoma Enterprise*, which is required every five years, said Algoma's chief financial officer Peter Winkley.

"We are doing work on the *Enterprise* and it's our own folks doing that work," he said. "It's only over that short period this winter ... we're hoping to have it complete by the end of March."

He said some workers handling the project on the bulk carrier are seasonal and hired every winter.

The previous dry docks tenant, Seaway Marine and Industrial, went bankrupt in 2013, throwing more than 100 people out of work.

Winkley said his company has no intention "at this time" of a longer or more permanent lease at the dry docks.

Kyle Groulx, a business representative for International Brotherhood of Boilermakers Local 128 representing the hourly workers, said many have since found work.

Some are also currently working on the project as seasonal workers.

"We are ... looking at a few things (about the current lease) from a legal standpoint," he said. "We're looking as to whether there are grounds for a successor employer claim."

Any such claim would pertain to whether or not the Steelworkers have the right to represent workers there.

"We would file and say that it should be done under our collective agreement," Groulx said.

Bruce Hodgson, director of market development at the Seaway, said the corporation is open to discussion for longer leases at the dry docks but there's nothing yet on deck.

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LOCALNEWS

FOOD: Celebrity chef praises Niagara

BOB TYMCZYSZYN/QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

Chef Michael Smith held a meet-and-greet early Sunday, the last day of the Twenty Valley Winter WineFest in Jordan.

Chef Michael Smith packs 'em in at festival

BOB TYMCZYSZYN
QMI Agency Niagara

Chef Michael Smith had a message for his listeners Sunday on the last day of the Twenty Valley Winter Winefest in downtown Jordan.

"Cooking for yourself is dead easy," he said.

"Just make that commitment."

The celebrity chef, TV show host and author is no stranger to the Niagara culinary scene, recalling visiting chef Michael Olson at On The Twenty some 20 years ago.

Since then, Smith has made many trips preparing meals at Brock University and visiting the culinary program at Niagara College.

"Niagara, without question, is the heartbeat, one of the centres of food and wine in Canada," he said. "It looms large, it's a place to come get inspired and have fun.

"There are few places in the world that sit so comfortably at the intersection of food and wine. It's an easy place to cook, to look around and find great local ingredients. The momentum has been building for so many years, the rest is the world is jumping on this bandwagon."

Asked about the local wines, he praised the region for the great progress the wines have been making.

Smith said every other bottle he has is from Canada.

"They are world class, particularly in this region," he said.

He also praised the event in Jordan.

Smith prepared a sold-out dinner Saturday night and Sunday's brunch was also sold out.

"I think it's great as Canadians we put something on like this, and that people will people show up," he said.

Doffing his Canada Goose coat for the autograph and book-signing, he offered up one tip for those home cooks.

"Just relax, take it easy. We put too much pressure on ourselves in home kitchens," he said.

He said he has zero tolerance for processed food.

"I understand it, but it is bankrupting our health-care system," he said.

"To put it all in perspective, as human beings we've cooked for ourselves for 100,000 generations. It's only the last two where we've lost our way."

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Twitter: @bobtym

IN BRIEF

$50,000 lottery winner from Port

A Port Colborne woman is $50,000 richer after winning the top prize on an Instant Crossword ticket.

Indoor, Freeway, Snowy and Thaw were only some of the words that netted Rose Agro her payday.

The winning ticket was purchased at Shoppers Drug Mart on South Pelham Rd. in Welland.

Ice safety warning issued

The ice may look safe for skating, but to test it could be hazardous to your health.

Welland Recreational Canal Corp. issued a safety warning Tuesday.

With the sudden plummeting of temperatures and ice forming on local waterways, people will be looking to expand their recreational activities onto and around the ice. Be cautioned that ice that looks safe may very well not be safe and be too thin for recreational purposes.

With many factors affecting ice thickness and the unpredictability of water and weather conditions, there is no sure way to guarantee the safety or thickness of ice.

The best way to stay safe? Stay off the ice.

WRCC is also reminding people — read, snowmobilers — that unauthorized use of motorized vehicles is prohibited on the waterway at all times, frozen or not.

Women's Place seeks directors

Women's Place of South Niagara is recruiting members for its board of directors.

The organization that provides shelter and counselling for women and their children in distress put out a call for applications Tuesday. Board members are appointed to two-year terms with an option to renew for another two years and are responsible for the governance and strategic leadership of Women's Place, and meet monthly.

The organization is looking for people with experience with not-for-profit organizations, skilled in organizational management, human resources, fundraising and government relations or advocacy.

Those who are interested should call Women's Place at 905-356-3933 at ext. 239. For more information visit www.womensplacesn.org.

LOCALNEWS

The Adoptables webisodes debut

GRANT LaFLECHE/QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

Lincoln County Humane Society's Britney Boston and Tribune reporter Maryanne Firth look over Paddy, a four-year-old shih tzu poodle that was on the debut webisode of The Adoptables, Wednesday. Paddy and Freddy, a second dog that was on the show, were both adopted within hours of the program launch. The full episode is available to watch on the three Niagara daily newspaper websites. New episodes will air every week.

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■ **ENTERTAINMENT:** Politicians bid to bring The Tonight Show to Niagara Falls

YOUTUBE SCREENGRAB

Jimmy Fallon and Nicole Kidman discussed, among other things, New Year's Eve in Niagara Falls during *The Tonight Show*. Kidman's husband Keith Urban headlined the show at Queen Victoria Park.

Mayors extend invite to Jimmy Fallon

ALISON LANGLEY
QMI Agency Niagara

The mayors of Niagara Falls want to turn lemons into lemonade.

Niagara Falls, N.Y., Mayor Paul Dyster and Niagara Falls, Ont., Mayor Jim Diodati plan to extend a personal invitation to *Tonight Show* host Jimmy Fallon to visit the border towns after the entertainer made some disparaging remarks about the U.S. side during a recent show.

"The New York side is almost like a Lemony Snicket book cover. Sad and trees with no leafs on it. And you go, 'What happened? Why is that side so much worse?'" asked Fallon, during an interview with Nicole Kidman.

In contrast, he referred to the Canadian side as "lights and fun."

Kidman appeared on the Tonight Show Jan. 6, less than a week after her husband, country star Keith Urban, headlined Niagara's New Year's Eve concert.

While Fallon's comments angered many residents stateside, the mayors on both sides of the border hope to use the controversy to their advantage.

Both mayors will send out a joint invitation to Fallon this week, inviting him to come and experience what both cities have to offer.

"We saw a window of opportunity open up so we're going to try to see if we can turn a little lemon into lemonade," Diodati said.

"We like to refer to both Niagara Falls as one city divided by a river, so we're going to send a collaborative letter to him inviting him to come down and have some fun."

Ideally, Diodati hopes Fallon will film a segment or an entire show in Niagara.

"We are the playground of western New York and southern Ontario," he added. "We offer a buffet of fun and entertainment and, Jimmy, this is the place you want to come to feast on fun."

Diodati on Friday turned to Twitter to invite Fallon to the region using the hashtag #tonightinniagarafalls.

He is encouraging residents to retweet his invite and to also post messages on the NBC website and Fallon's Facebook page.

Dyster could not be reached for comment.

alison.langley@sunmedia.ca
Twitter: @nfallslangley

■ **JUNE 2015:** Baywatch, Knight Rider star confirmed

The Hoff heading to Comic Con

JOHN LAW
QMI Agency Niagara

Niagara Falls will get two days of The Hoff this June.

David Hasselhoff, the star of two iconic TV shows, has been booked for the fifth annual Niagara Falls Comic Con. The 62-year-old actor/singer will appear June 6 and 7 at the Scotiabank Convention Centre.

Hasselhoff first made his mark on the 1980s action series *Knight Rider* before hitting the beach for *Baywatch*.

Originally a failure on NBC, *Baywatch* was revived by Hasselhoff for the syndication market, where it was eventually shown in 140 countries. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, it is still the most watched TV show of all time at 1.1 billion viewers.

In a lucrative side career, Hasselhoff was also a popular singer in Europe, enjoying huge chart success in Germany.

"Acting, singing and producing, you name it, he's done it all," says Niagara Falls Comic Con show producer Chris Dabrowski.

Hasselhoff has also appeared in the films *Click, Dodgeball, Piranha 3DD, The Spongebob Squarepants Movie* and the upcoming *Ted 2*.

Before Samuel L. Jackson took over the role, he was also Marvel's *Nick Fury* for a 1998 movie.

In recent years he has been on reality shows *Dancing With the Stars* and Britain's *Got Talent*.

Comic Con will run June 5 to 7. Among the confirmed celebrities are Yvonne Craig (Batgirl), Linda Blair, Billy Dee Williams, Elvira, Margot Kidder, Luke Perry and Manu Bennett. Comic book artists include Darwyn Cooke, Phil Hester and creator of The Crow, James O'Barr.

Tickets range from $25 to $35, or $70 for a three-day pass. Visit www.niagarafallscomiccon.com

john.law@sunmedia.ca

LOCALNEWS

■ **THEATRE:** Canalside Players host mystery fundraiser dinner

Valentine's Day script calls for murder

MARYANNE FIRTH
QMI Agency Niagara

Canalside Players want to offer up a different type of outing for Valentine's Day — dinner with a side of murder.

The community theatre group, run in conjunction with the City of Welland, is hosting a murder mystery dinner Saturday, Feb. 14.

Love Is Murder, written and directed by the group's artistic director Lee Moffatt, introduces the audience to a seedy latenight lounge and exposes them to the many characters found within.

"It has action, it has music — a little bit of everything," Moffatt said of the show, which goes hand in hand with a catered dinner.

Canalside Players chair Jeff Etling described the production as "very interactive," with actors sitting at tables in the crowd.

"Everyone is a suspect, even the audience," Moffatt said, adding that only increases the fun of the evening.

Diners will make notes throughout the evening, tracking clues and trying to determine who the culprit is.

Before the murderer is revealed, the guesses will be collected and prizes handed out later.

The three-hour show provides a different option for anyone looking for a romantic but fun evening out for Valentine's Day, Moffatt said.

"It's better than just going to a restaurant for dinner. It's interactive, exciting and you can still spend time with your significant other."

MARYANNE FIRTH/QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

Canalside Players chair Jeff Etling and artistic director Lee Moffatt jokingly act out a scene while discussing the group's upcoming murder mystery fundraising event set for Feb. 14.

The murder mystery acts as a fundraiser for the theatre group's two shows planned for 2015, including a spring production of Neil Simon's Last of the Red Hot Lovers.

While the city does help to fund the group, more money is needed to assist with the cost of props, sets and licensing fees, Moffatt said.

The murder mystery takes place in the atrium of Welland Community Wellness Complex. Doors open at 5:30 p.m., followed by the performance at 6. A cash bar will be available.

Tickets, available at the wellness complex, cost $33 for wellness passholders and $35 for everyone else if purchased by Jan. 31.

Tickets purchased between Feb. 1 and Feb. 7, the last day to buy, cost $37 for passholders and $40 for everyone else.

Auditions for the Canalside Players' spring production will get underway at the end of February.

For updates, visit www.facebook.com/CanalsidePlayersWelland.

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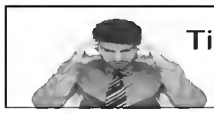

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